



Article published on July 26th 2012 | [Hobby](#)

Whether you're an experienced web enthusiast or a relative newcomer to the internet, building a family tree online can be tricky. That's because you need to combine the knowledge of your own family with the tools available to you on the internet, in order to create an engaging and comprehensive family tree that you, your relatives and "if you wish" members of the public can explore. If you're not sure how to start building a family tree online, here are a few simple tips to follow.

Initially, you might find it easiest to write down all the information that you currently have: for example, names of your family members, their birth dates and birth places, and (if applicable) their death dates and locations of death. If there are gaps in your own knowledge, turn to family members first to fill in the blanks. Older relatives or members of the family who now live abroad may be able to give you the information you need. Once you've exhausted these contacts, then you can turn to online records and genealogy databases to complete your family tree.

When researching your family history online, there are certain details you will need to keep in mind when looking at records. For instance, perhaps you're aware that your great-grandfather had three children from a first marriage and you are trying to trace the details of these offspring to include in your family tree. Make sure you know your great-grandfather's full name and preferably his occupation as well. It will also help to know the details of his first wife, including her full name and occupation, as well as her maiden name. It may also be of assistance to know their place of residence, as this can help narrow down family history results.

Once you've filled in any holes that exist in your family tree, make a draft on paper before publishing an online version. The easiest place to start when creating a family tree is with yourself. Work outwards to include your immediate family, then include grandparents and keep on expanding with the information that you have. Even if the information you have seems overwhelming, simply writing down your family tree on paper can make things much clearer and can feel very productive.

When you're happy with your draft version, it's time to take it online. Whatever you're working whether it's an Irish family tree or a Dutch one "a little online research is sure to yield a template that will suit your individual family. Genealogy enthusiasts have a reputation for being friendly and approachable people, so if you're unsure which online family tree provider to go with, post a message on a forum and see what feedback you receive.

Once you've made your choice, make sure you're able to control the privacy settings on your family tree. For example, perhaps you'd like to set a password so only members of your family can view the online family tree. Alternatively, your family tree can be public for any internet user to see. If you're going down the latter route, ensure that you have the general approval of your relatives before publishing the family tree.

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Article Keywords:

Irish family tree, family tree online, family history, genealogy, family history research, online family tree

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